

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5079

As of February 4, 2013

Title: An act relating to providing compensation for damage to livestock caused by wolves.

Brief Description: Providing compensation for damage to livestock caused by wolves.

Sponsors: Senators Roach, Becker, Pearson, Benton, Schoesler and Honeyford.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/29/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: Role of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) Generally. DFW serves as manager of the state's fish and wildlife resources. Among other duties, DFW must protect, perpetuate, and establish the basic rules and regulations governing the harvest of fish and wildlife.

Wildlife Damage Compensation. The Legislature has authorized DFW to manage a wildlife damage compensation program that compensates commercial crop owners for damage from elk and deer. The program also compensates commercial livestock owners for damage from cougars, wolves, and bears.

Specifically, a commercial livestock owner may receive compensation for cattle, sheep, and horses injured or killed by bears, wolves, or cougars. DFW may only pay claims:

- using amounts specifically appropriated for this purpose; and
- up to statutorily specified amounts per animal.

Under the livestock damage compensation program, commercial livestock include cattle, sheep, and horses held or raised by a person for sale.

Summary of Bill: Establishes a General Fund-Based Funding Mechanism for Livestock Damage Caused by Wolves. A specific mechanism for providing compensation for livestock damage caused by wolves is established. This system:

- provides DFW with \$50,000 in annual general fund-state statutory spending authority to provide compensation for livestock damage caused by wolves; and
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- establishes a mechanism to transfer any unspent amount of the \$50,000 at the conclusion of the fiscal year to a new dedicated, non-appropriated account. These transfers are capped once the dedicated account reaches \$100,000. The account can be used to pay mitigation, assessments, and payments for livestock damage caused by wolves.

Establishes a Reporting Requirement. DFW must annually provide a brief report to the Office of Financial Management and Legislature including information such as the number of reported wolf-livestock conflicts, claims submitted and paid, and projected future conflicts and claims.

Modifies Livestock Damage Payment Eligibility. A person involved in commercial agriculture may receive compensation for damage to cattle, sheep, or horses, whether or not an animal is specifically raised for sale.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The wolf plan should be implemented, including finding sustainable funding for wolf management and livestock damage compensation. While the funding is much needed, there are concerns that the \$50,000 is not enough to cover livestock losses that will occur from predation. This money should be limited to commercial livestock damage compensation. Key to this bill is that the money for damage claims does not come from hunting and fishing license fees, and that any unused money rolls into a dedicated account.

CON: Short-term economic planning is being pursued rather than a long-term approach that has been assessed by the scientific community and provided initially.

OTHER: There is a need for non-lethal management education, community outreach, and coordination of implementation across multiple agencies.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Roach, prime sponsor; Melinda Hirsch, Center for Biological Diversity; Tyler Cox, Bill Sieverkropp, Jess Kayser, Pace Amidon, Brad Cameron, WA Cattlemen Assn.; Dave Ware, DFW; Wes McCart, Stevens County Commissioner; Sheilah Kennedy, Okanogan County Commissioner; Mike Manus, Pend Oreille County Commissioner; Brad Miller, Ferry County Commissioner; Tom Davis, WA Farm Bureau.

CON: Bob McCoy, Roger Chapanis, Jeff Hamm, citizens.

OTHER: Lorna Smith, Western Wildlife Outreach; Fred Koontz, Woodland Park Zoo; Diane Gallegos, Wolf Haven International; Bob Morton, citizen.